



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 128

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "STRENGTH-BASED" ORGANIZATION (PART 18)

The Twelve Questions

Trusting that one's coworkers share a commitment to quality is a key to great team performance.

Question 9: "My co-workers are committed to doing quality work."

Highly productive employees tell us there is a vast difference between being named to a team and actually identifying with that team. We have all experienced being assigned to a team or a workgroup -- our manager assigns us, and our name is added to the team roster. Just because our names are added, however, doesn't mean that we psychologically join the team, especially if we are afraid the other team members don't share our commitment to producing quality work. Helping all members identify the team characteristics that will result in a quality product can lead to insights into greater efficiency and increased productivity.

When employees are asked, "Are you committed to quality?" they all answer in the affirmative. This reflects employees' natural, human tendency to think highly of the work they produce. Since they all give the same answer to this question, however, the question does not differentiate the most productive workgroups from those that are less productive. Instead, employees' answers to the question, "My co-workers are committed to doing quality work," are much more revealing. Employees want their co-workers to share their commitment to quality, and want to be part of an organization that challenges and enables them to excel.

Often, the definition of quality sets the tone of a workplace culture. If quality is defined as the absence of defects or mistakes, we send a strong message to employees that encourages them to cover up mistakes or problems quickly, with little attention or exposure (or often called "zero risk tolerance"). In the best workplaces, managers realize that human beings will make mistakes, and can learn from correcting them. Some would say that's the best way to learn. In these workplaces, quality is defined as the process employees use to recognize a problem and work toward its solution. In healthy workplaces, employees understand that a customer's loyalty can actually increase if the employees take a positive approach toward solving a quality problem. The best managers and workgroups do not scapegoat; rather, they see quality issues as a challenge to improve their product or service and, thus, to increase customer loyalty.

A problem can also bring out a greater sense of teamwork in a workplace. Employees who are committed to doing quality work look at a problem as a challenge to improve their team cohesiveness. They use the power of the team not only to overcome the crisis, but to correct the process to avoid future problems, and move on to greater productivity and quality. Interestingly, some of the most productive teamwork is observed during these times of crisis. The excellence and the spirit of teamwork that emerge from dealing effectively with problem situations are the stuff of great workplaces.

Developing trusting relationships with one's coworkers provides a significant emotional compensation for employees -- a key trait of retention.

Question 10: "I have a best friend at work."

Human beings are social animals, and work is a social institution. Often, it is a place where long-term relationships are formed, from networking relationships, to friendships, to marriages. In fact, if you did not meet your spouse in high school or college, chances are you met him or her at work. The evolution of quality relationships between people is a very normal process, and is an important part of a healthy workplace. In the best workplaces, employers recognize that employees want to forge quality relationships with their coworkers, and that company loyalty can be built from such relationships.

This question -- "I have a best friend at work" -- is clearly one of the most controversial of the 12 traits of highly productive work groups. In answering this item, many employees do not stumble over the word "friend" since they have many friends at work. Instead, they may get stuck on the word "best" because they feel the term implies exclusivity, and they have trouble identifying one "best friend" among their friendships with their coworkers.

Gallup discovered the power of this item in identifying talented work groups -- that the strongest agreement with this item occurred in the most productive work groups. Because some employees had difficulty with the item, Gallup went back to those groups and softened the word "best" to "close" or "good," or excluded the word "best" entirely. When this was done, however, the item lost its power to differentiate highly productive work groups from mediocre work groups. This suggested that the item's use of the word "best" actually pinpoints a dynamic of great work groups.

Gallup has also observed that employees who report having a best friend at work were:

- 43% more likely to report having received praise or recognition for their work in the last seven days
- 37% more likely to report that someone at work encourages their development
- 35% more likely to report coworker commitment to quality

- 28% more likely to report that, in the last six months, someone at work has talked to them about their progress
- 27% more likely to report that the mission of their company makes them feel their job is important
- 27% more likely to report that their opinions seem to count at work
- 21% more likely to report they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day

While organizations often pay significant attention to the loyalty employees feel toward the organization, the best employers recognize that loyalty also exists among employees toward one another. All employees have "leaving moments" when they examine whether to leave or stay at an organization. The best managers in the world observe that the quality and depth of the relationships that employees have with others on the job will be a critical component that affects their decision to stay or to leave.

This item also cuts to the issue of trust between coworkers. When strong loyalty is felt in an employee work group, employees believe that their coworkers will help them during times of stress and challenge. In this day of rapid-fire change, reorganization, mergers and acquisitions, having best friends at work may be the true key to effective change integration and adaptation. While employees who have best friends at work do not report lower levels of stress on the job compared to those who do not have best friends, they do identify significantly higher levels of healthy stress management.

Next: Question #11 of 12: "In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress."

Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: "*First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*." For more information about the research and book, please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>.

[Flag Voice Contents](#)

This page is maintained by [HR Webmaster \(CG-1A\)](#)